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[Title Page]

THE SHILLUK OF THE UPPER NILE

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[21] THIS essay is based primarily on literary sources,¹ which contain usually full references to the religious and cosmological ideas of the Shilluk. In places, I have reinterpreted earlier writings on the Shilluk in the light of my own knowledge of the related Dinka, and of other Nilotic studies. The concepts of these Nilotic peoples are alike in many ways, and the Shilluk and Dinka have for long been considered as related, from the point of view of anthropological theory, by the presence among them both of different forms of the institution of 'divine kingship', studied by Fraser and Seligman.² Upon this institution much of their interpretation of the universe and of their own place in it depend.

[71] Lack of definition and dogma in their religion and cosmology makes it possible for Nilotic peoples to accept many different versions of their mythology and history, and also permits some syncretism of belief. I do not consider here speculations about the possible influences of ancient Egypt, the Fung, Islam, or the early monophysite Christianity of the Sudan, on Shilluk belief.³ It is, in fact, remarkable that contact with foreign peoples and ideas, over a long period, should have left so little mark on Shilluk thought. Some of the stories which Hofmayr⁴ attributes to Christian influence are widely known among other Nilotic peoples and elsewhere, in places farther removed from probable contact with Christianity. Lack of formal definition of beliefs and notions about the universe also makes the study of Shilluk cosmology necessarily a study based on inferences from myths, hymns, and other texts, collected piecemeal from informants, none of whom can speak with any final authority. It is clear that Shilluk cosmology is not present to the mind of any one Shilluk as a single, orthodox system, abstracted from the narrative flow and imaginative detail of myth. Even one man may tell slightly different versions of the same story,⁵ for the telling is

¹ References throughout are to the Shilluk bibliography appended, the dates being the dates of the publications cited. Some of the sources contain many texts in the Shilluk language, and where these are translated into a language other than English, I have given an English version after examining the Shilluk text. I should like to thank all writers on the Shilluk, upon whose observations this summary and representation entirely depend. Their publications, however, are not all easily accessible, nor are they specifically concerned with the analysis of the Shilluk ideas here studied. This must be my excuse for writing about a people of great ethnological interest and importance, who have already been described in detail by writers who have known them well.

² J. G. Fraser, 1911. C. G. Seligman, 1911. C. G. and B. E. Seligman, 1925.

³ Discussion of Shilluk contacts with some of these will be found in W. Hofmayr, 1925, and D. Westermann, 1928. For general cultural and conceptual similarities between ancient Egypt and negro Africa, the reader may be referred to C. G. Seligman, 1934, and H. Frankfort, 1948, among others.

⁴ 1925, pp. 193-4, the stories of a fall of man, and of a woman's bearing a god.

⁵ D. B. Olyn, 1948 (2).

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partly a creative process, and there is no writing to establish a preferred and approved text. Shilluk experience and knowledge of their world, which we have try to understand by analysis and systematisation, is by them synthesised in an imaginative whole, at the centre of which are their early leader and hero, Nyikang, and the divine being which they call *jook*. Though *jook* is thought ultimately to dispose what happens in the universe, Nyikang, who created the Shilluk kingdom, is the subject of most mythology. There is nowhere any indication that the Shilluk have formulated elaborate ideas of the general order of all creation. Their notion of cosmogenesis is of the creation of that order which, as they see it, was built up by Nyikang, and has been maintained by his successors, the Shilluk kings. Before considering the wider significance of Nyikang and *jook*, it is convenient to give a brief account of the land of the Shilluk, the life they lead in it, and the general outlines of their social organisation. With these in mind, it is possible to analyse their cosmological ideas in the broad outline to which an essay of this length is necessarily restricted.

Environment and History

The Shilluk live along the west bank of the Nile in the south of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, where their hamlets are built in close succession, following the line of the river from around Kaka to Lake No. They are about 110,000 people,¹ densely settled on a narrow strip of savannah country nearly 200 miles long, and four to five walking-hours in width. The soil is black and fertile near the river and its inlets, becoming sandier towards the neighbouring Arab country in the north and the Arab and Nuba country of Kordofan to the west. On the east bank of the Nile are the related Dinka, the Shilluk's neighbours to the east and south, and there are Shilluk settlements, bounded by Dinka and Nuer, on the east bank and on the lower reaches of the Sobat. Though their values are predominantly those of a cattle-herding people, the Shilluk lead a less pastoral, transhumant life than the Nuer or Dinka.² Their cattle are estimated at 25,000, and they keep sheep and goats. Since their settlements are strung along the bank of the Nile, they can find grass for their herds near home in the dry season, from January to April, and cultivation seems to receive more time and attention among them than among less sedentary Nilotes. From June to September the rains fall, and much of the country becomes flooded. The early rains are the time for sowing the staple crop of millet, of which many varieties are grown, along with maize, sesame, and various beans and pumpkins. These depend upon the rains, and are harvested between September and November. Tobacco, also called 'the grass of the ancestors', depends on hand-watering from the river, near which it is grown in the dry season.

¹ The authorities vary considerably in their estimates of the human and cattle population. The figures given here are quoted from those given by Mr. John Donald, of the Sudan Political Service, and published by Professor Evans-Prichard, 1948.

² P. P. Howell and W. F. G. Thomson, 1948.

105 Linguistically, the Shilluk belong to the Luo-speaking people, amongst whom are also the Anuk of the Baro and Pibor rivers between the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Ethiopia, the Lango and Acholi of Uganda, the Abar of Uganda and the Belgian Congo, and many scattered groups in the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province of the Sudan, of whom the Luo (Jur) are the most important. Some of these claim some slight contact, in comparatively recent times, with the Shilluk kingdom. Amongst the Luo-speakers the Shilluk are unique in their possession of a single royal dynasty, in relation to which all are members of one Shilluk kingdom, with well-defined territorial and social limits. By this also they are chiefly set apart from the other Nilotic negroes, the Nuer and Dinka, with whom they otherwise have much in common in physique, character, and culture. Perhaps more than the other Nilotes, the Shilluk have for long been in intermittently hostile contact with foreign enemies and foreign governments. The traveller Schweinfurth, who visited them in 1869, says that at that time little or nothing remained of the original condition of the Shilluk, who of all Nilotic negroes 'used to uphold the most perfectly regulated government', which, he says, can only be properly appreciated by reference to the registers of the expedition of Mohammed Ali earlier in the century.¹ We cannot now know what the Shilluk were really like at that time, and it is certain that some of their indigenous custom, particularly that concerning the election and disposal of the Shilluk king, has been interfered with to such an extent that the Shilluk themselves are uncertain about some details of the old belief and practice. Nevertheless, until the present day the Shilluk have retained a consciousness of their national identity and integrity, and have been slow to modify their ideas to accord with those of the various strangers in their land. The main features of their social structure remain, and under the present government, versions of their ceremonies for the funeral and installation of the king have been carefully observed and described.² Enough of the traditional practice and belief remains, and has been recorded, to make unnecessary too much speculative reconstruction of the Shilluk past; unfortunately the absence of historical records makes it impossible to study the development of the kingship, which might explain some apparent anomalies in accounts of the present situation.

Social Organisation

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105 The Shilluk are divided, on the basis of descent traced in the male line, into about 100 different descent groups, which have been called both clans and lineages. They are exogamous, and some of them, at least, are totemically affiliated with natural or artificial species of various kinds. Members of these descent groups may be found living in any part of Shilluk country, and the main groups are themselves dispersed in smaller groups throughout Shilluk country. The largest descent groups are without any corporate

¹ 1873/1874.

² G. Schweinfurth, 1873, p. 93.

³ P. Munro, 1918, and Howell and Thomson, 1946.

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existence. The smallest unit of Shilluk social structure is the family (pa) [2] living in a homestead of one or two huts. From one to fifty or more such homesteads built together form a hamlet, the members of which keep their cattle together, and are gathered round a headman; a group of hamlets forms a settlement, of which there are about a hundred in Shilluk-land. The settlement is composed of branches of different descent groups, one of which is dominant within the settlement and forms a nucleus around which the others form themselves into a distinct community. This dominant descent group or lineage provides the leader or chief of the settlement. Settlements are politically opposed to each other, though there have been in the past loose confederations of settlements, which have been used, and sharpened in outline, for administrative purposes. The whole of Shilluk land is divided into two provinces, Gar in the north and Luak in the south. All the Shilluk recognize a common head of their whole land, the røk, who is here called the king; the king always comes from the royal clan, the Amørøk, founded by the first Shilluk king, Nyikang; it is the largest clan in Shilluk land, and may have representatives in any settlement. There is now a royal capital at Fashoda. In Shilluk tradition the earliest Shilluk kings had no fixed capital, but reigned from their natal homes. Now, although the capital at Fashoda has been long established, the wives of the king are sent away from Fashoda to various parts of Shilluk land to bear their children, and the children of the king (eyørøk) are brought up away from the capital. Only those princes whose fathers have been installed as kings of the Shilluk can themselves claim to be installed and, in theory at least, princes who are thus eligible may at any time advance their claims by killing the reigning king. Besides the royal clan, and the lineages of 'commoner' clans, known collectively as the cök, there is a distinct clan called øwø, originally a branch of the royal house, but said to have been established by an early Shilluk king. Members of this clan have special duties to perform in connexion with the king, but do not have royal status. In addition, there are the kong røk, servants of the king, composed of wives of previous kings, descendants of personal attendants of the king, people possessed by the spirit of Nyikang or of some other king, and others who in one way or another have become retainers dependent on the royal house. From these came the guardians and priests of the shrines of Nyikang, of which there are several in various parts of Shilluk country, and the shrines and graves of other Shilluk kings. Offerings are made at these graves and shrines as part of the religious cult of Nyikang and the royal house, which is the main cult of the Shilluk, though offerings are made to their own ancestors also by the heads of the commoner lineages. Their totemic observances seem to amount to little more than not eating the totemic species, and both totemism and the cult of ancestors of commoner descent groups are said to figure less largely in Shilluk religion than the cult of Nyikang and the kings. Shilluk totemism may in fact be of Dinka origin. Besides the priests of the Nyikang cult, and operating apart from them,

- 105 there are divinities of various sorts, seers and holy men, called *ajaga*. Such people may also be priests of the Nyikang cult, but in themselves they do not form part of any organized religious system embracing the whole kingdom. There is said to be no cult of the divine being *jwak*, who is approached through Nyikang and the Shilluk kings.¹

Myths of Origin and Traditional History

- 101 In considering the Shilluk apprehension of order in their universe, we may first suggest how they classify themselves and other people with whom they have been in contact. The name 'Shilluk,' used by most authorities, seems to be an Arab form of their own name for themselves, *Col* or *Ocolo*, or 'the children of Col'. They call their country 'the land of Col',² but it is also spoken of as 'the land of Nyikang', and they may refer to themselves as *Okang*, which is possibly derived from the name of their leader. All those
- 173 who now are Shilluk and live in Shilluk country do not think that they had a common origin. Some of them think that they came originally with Nyikang, and others that they are descended from people who in one way or another Nyikang eventually incorporated into his kingdom. The most
- 173 detailed and circumstantial of Shilluk myths are about the origin of the present internal organization of the Shilluk kingdom. Less detailed stories,
- 821 which nevertheless seem, for the Shilluk, to have something of the intrinsic validity which we attach to history, are told in order to assimilate to the
- 184 Shilluk world their knowledge of other Nilotic peoples. In their accounts of their own history, and of their relationship with other Nilotes, we find an interest in process, which is absent from their accounts of their relations with other peoples outside their system. This in itself might be expected, though it might have been supposed that the long period during which they have been in contact with non-Nilotic peoples would have generated more elaborate aetiological stories to explain the presence and customs of quite foreign human beings. Even within the Nilotic world Shilluk stories of their relationship with the Luo of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, with whom they can have had only the most casual and occasional contact for many years, are a great deal more circumstantial than those of their original relationship with the Dinka, who are among their nearest neighbours. They thus have traditions of relationship which do more than account for their social relations at the present day, and which have not been modified to accord with them. There is some indication that they value the knowledge of historical tradition for its own sake.

Shilluk classification of the peoples with whom they have been in contact, or of whom they know, may briefly be described as follows. Differences of function, status, and origin within the Shilluk kingdom are ultimately attributed to Nyikang, or to one of his successors, the early Shilluk kings.

¹ This very brief survey of those features of Shilluk social organization necessary for an understanding of their cosmology is drawn from many sources, which I have not thought it necessary to cite individually.

² Westermann, 1912, et al.

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Differences and divisions between the Shilluk and other Nilotic peoples are attributed to differences between Nyikang and others who are thought to have been once closely associated with him. Differences between the Shilluk and people whose culture and system of thought are quite unlike their own are attributed to an ubiquitous God, *juak*. Leaving aside for the moment the Shilluk classification of people within their own kingdom, I mention briefly some of the stories referring to the relationship between the Shilluk and some other Nilotes, and between the Shilluk and foreign invaders.

According to one Shilluk tradition,¹ in the original migration from their first homeland, 'the land of Duwat', the Shilluk were with their leader Nyikang, and with them were the Dinka led by Dengdit, the Anuak led by Gilo, and the Luo led by Odimo. There are various versions of this story, and the presence of Odimo in it is inconsistent with other stories about him. The kin relationship supposed to exist between the leaders also varies from one account to another. In this version, the Anuak first broke away, and then the Dinka, and finally, when the Shilluk were on the fringes of the country they now occupy, the Luo turned away towards the Bahr-el-Ghazal. The story shows some idea of successive developments in a necessary chronological order, and the stories of the relationship of the Shilluk with the Luo contain circumstantial details, some of which are confirmed in independent accounts given by the Luo themselves.² These are people who are thought to have been involved in Shilluk history from very early times; we are not given any indication that the Shilluk attempt to account for their existence, but only that they themselves account for their relationship with the Shilluk. It is not so with the stories about white and brown people. One tells, for example, how it was that God (*juak*) came to help the *turak*, the Turk or European,³ rather than others of his sons, the people of Darfur, the Abyssinians, and the Shilluk, who were afraid or refused to approach him.⁴ Another version, found also among other Nilotic peoples, attributes the success of the light-skinned people both to superior guile on their part, and to some preference shown them by God. We are also told that when God began to make men, he made them from light-coloured clay, until his hands became dirty towards the end of his task, and he then made the Shilluk, who lost their equality with the light-skinned people.⁵ Like other Nilotes, the Shilluk seem to have singled out writing and guns as the gifts with which God gave supremacy to the foreigners;⁶ and Shilluk songs recorded by Hildebrandt⁷ suggest that circumcision has come to stand for much that is contemptible in foreign custom and

¹ Hildebrandt, 1922, p. 14.

² J. F. Crowther, 1920, has tried to build up the traditions of the Luo (Lor) speaking peoples into a connected history.

³ Though Turks, Arabs, and Europeans can be verbally distinguished from each other in Shilluk, Europeans, particularly when they are officials, are often called *turak*.

⁴ Hildebrandt, 1922, p. 241.

⁵ Westermann, 1925.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁷ 1922, pp. 240 & 2.

behaviour. Although there are many Shilluk names by which non-Nilotic foreigners may be distinguished from each other, they are also classed together as *obwonyo* (foreigners), a word also used for a reddish millet,¹ and as such they are distinguished collectively from Nilotic peoples who are not included in this category. The Nuba (*dongo* or *dhongo*)² seem to occupy a special position among foreigners, for Nyikang himself established a relationship with them by marrying his daughter to a Nuba.

As the Shilluk see it, the other Nilotes were separated from them in the course of a common history. To explain the presence and dominance of foreigners from outside their Nilotic world, they have stories of a metaphysical kind, positing some special act of God. These stories have clearly been invented in recent times for purely explanatory purposes. Shilluk interest in foreigners, as shown in myth and song, centres primarily on the way in which they have been opposed by Nyikang and the Shilluk, and the more they can be subordinated to Nyikang, the more they are assimilated to Shilluk tradition. Thus, it seems that the fighting with the invaders of their country in fairly recent times has, for the Shilluk, little of the imaginative significance which they attach to superficially trivial incidents in the lives of their early kings. If Hofmayr's derivation³ of the word *obwonyo* (foreigner) is correct, the Shilluks' first national enemy, whom Nyikang urged them to resist, gave their name to others who followed. Nyikang and his successors, the Shilluk kings, are thought to have been the leaders of opposition to such national enemies. Nyikang both relates the Shilluk to other Nilotes whom they know, and focuses their hostility to attacks on their national integrity and exclusiveness. He represents, in this and other ways which may later be considered, the specifically Shilluk way of life and thought.

The Order of the World and Society

The order of Shilluk society is best approached by a consideration of the myths of migration under Nyikang, for some features of Shilluk society are thought to have originated in that period. Some of the details of these myths cannot be fully understood without a preliminary knowledge of the main natural divisions of the Shilluk world. Writers on the Shilluk do not report any story of an original state of chaos, in the strict sense, when man, earth, and sky were together in one undifferentiated whole, though such stories exist among the Dinka. There are Shilluk stories which do seem to suggest that at one time the world was not differentiated as it now is. For

¹ J. A. Henry, 1937; Westermann, 1912, p. 248, transliterates the word for red millet slightly differently from the word for foreigners. Hofmayr, 1925, says that the word is derived from *ya paay*, the name originally given by the Shilluk to the Fung, with whom they were in early contact. Another word for the Fung, said to include the people of Senaar generally, is *cal*.

² Henry, 1937, et al. *Dongo* probably means 'hill-people'. In a hymn quoted by Hofmayr 1925, p. 7, the Fung or the people of Senaar are referred to as *dongo cal*.

³ See note 1.

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example, it is said that¹ originally God (*juok*) had the people in his land, until they ate fruit which made them sick, and God therefore sent them away. Another story tells that there was once a road to the moon which men could use, but they became too heavy to do so, in circumstances which are not here relevant.² Yet another story³ tells how the sun and moon used to live together, until they quarrelled and therefore are no longer together. In some Shilluk myths (to be considered later) it is said that some men were not differentiated from animals and other creatures. There is thus the implication, though it may be conveyed in stories which are perhaps not told very seriously, that some things which were once together are now apart. The broadest division of the space around them recognized by the Shilluk is between what is above (the sky) and what is below (the earth). There is a Shilluk riddle which runs: 'What are the two half-round things (in Shilluk, *opanno*, literally 'loaves') of God (*juok*)?' and the answer is 'heaven and earth'. Hofmayr gives the explanation that 'the form in which this is figured is that of a loaf of bread'.⁴ Besides sky and earth, there is the river, a third main region of the Shilluk spatial ambient. This tripartite division of the universe into earth, sky, and river, corresponds, of course, to the real categories which anyone in Shilluk country is bound in some way to acknowledge, and in which he is bound on some occasions to think. The savannah country is without mountains, ravines, forests, or other distinctive natural features which might diversify its general contours, and strike the imagination forcibly enough to modify the clarity of the simple, primary distinctions which a man observes in the natural world around him. In such a land, where there is nothing of any size to break the horizon, the sky does indeed become apparent as separate region, almost a place, in relation to the earth. Besides these, there is the river, reflecting both earth and sky. The crops and grass, on which the Shilluk and their herds depend, require that the sky should send rain and the river should rise, and they also need the fish which the river contains. The three regions of earth, sky, and river have values and associations which make the division significant in Shilluk religion and cosmology, as well as in their economy. Their Nilotic neighbours live in a country which, generally, is not unlike their own. The real foreigners come from country of different and inferior quality. Among the Dinka and Nuer also it is thought that the real foreigners come from a country different in nature from their own.

Legends of Nyikang

Legends of the birth and wanderings of Nyikang do not suggest that they occurred in a country very different from that in which the Shilluk now live, but it was a long way away from the present Shilluk kingdom. We are told that the land of Duwat, or the land of Kero, from which the Shilluk

¹ Hofmayr, 1929, p. 238. The details may be Christian.² *Ibid.*, p. 244.³ *Ibid.*, p. 244.⁴ 1929, p. 299.

173 originally came, was to the south of their present home, but whether south-west or south-east varies from one account to another. This homeland was 'at the end (or "head") of the earth,'¹ and near a great lake.² Apart from this, we hear only that in that land there was a king, called Okwa, and that he was the father of Duwat, Nyikang, and other sons. Also, there was then no death, for as people became old, they were trampled by cattle, and became infants again.³ Accounts of this first land, which also represents the beginning of Shilluk historical time, are sparse and simple. This may be consistent with the fact that in this original land and time, the Shilluk suppose that they were not differentiated from others of the Luo-speaking group. Their accounts of this early period are like their other most general cosmological ideas, in showing little of the development and systematization which come from meditation and reflection; elaboration and detail appear in their myths with the emergence of Nyikang, and therefore with the beginning of the Shilluk royal house and the Shilluk nation. Of the time before that, they know only the little which has here been stated.

173 There are various accounts of the birth of Nyikang. In one, it is said that he was the son of Okwa, who was the son of Omara, who came from heaven.⁴ In another he is the son of Okwa, but Okwa traces descent through several forefathers to a great white or grey cow, which was created by God in the river.⁵ Nyikang's mother, Nyakaya, was either a crocodile, or partly crocodile, and is now associated with the crocodile in Shilluk thought, though she is also a woman. In all versions of the story of Nyikang's ancestry, his descent is traced through his father to a man who came from heaven, or from a special creation of God in the form of a cow, and his mother is a creature of the river with the attributes of the crocodile. Nyakaya, the mother of Nyikang, represents in Shilluk thought the totality of riverain beings and phenomena, and offerings are made to her on the river bank, at the grassy spots where the crocodile emerges. She is also especially associated with birth and with new-born babies.⁶ Seligman was told that 'unusual behaviour on the part of almost any land animal would lead the Shilluk to look upon the creature as a temporary incarnation of Nyikang', while 'unusual behaviour on the part of a water animal would be put down to the animal incarnating the spirit of Nikaia (Nyakai)'.⁷

173 Nyikang and his followers started their wanderings from their original home as a result of a quarrel between Nyikang and his half-brother, sometimes said to be his 'brother', Duwat.⁸ They quarrelled about who should succeed their father, Okwa, as leader and king. Since Duwat was elected, Nyikang left with his faction. According to one story, he took the royal

(173) ¹ Oyster, 1918 (3). This is also a common Dinka idea, though they say that this land was 'at the foot of the earth'. It has for them not only the suggestion of remoteness, but also of being the time and place from which their traditions start.

² M. E. C. Pamphrey, 1941.

³ Westermann, 1912, p. 137.

⁴ Haden, 1925, p. 159.

⁵ Westermann, 1912, p. 139.

⁶ Oyster, 1918 (3).

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 133 ff., et al.

⁸ C. G. Seligman, 1932, p. 86.

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emblems.¹ The story shows that, from the earliest times, the Shilluk suppose the kingship to have been a source of rivalry between the sons of the previous king. Nyikang is not thought to have been the elder of the brothers, and there is no account of any superior claim on his part, except that he also had a following. There is no emphasis in the myth on any customary order of succession and so today any son of a king who has once been installed is theoretically eligible to become king if he can press his claim. In the past, at least, a man could retain the kingship only if he was able to defend himself against rival claimants. Rivalry over who shall be king is intrinsic to the Shilluk type of kingship, and may perhaps be seen as the most extreme form of the separation of the person from the office consistent with hereditary right to succession.

In the course of their wanderings, Nyikang and his followers came to a country occupied by Dimo,² where they lived for a while, and Nyikang married Dimo's daughter. She bore children, of whom the most important was his son Dak. Dak then quarrelled with Dimo, whose people wanted to kill him. Nyikang made an effigy of Dak, which was speared in Dak's place by the followers of Dimo. Effigies of Nyikang, Dak, and another son of Nyikang called Cal, are now used, as will be described, in the ceremonies for the installation of the Shilluk king. This is the first mention of an effigy, which was thus an idea of Nyikang. In one story Dak is a mischievous and quarrelsome figure, who grew to a tremendous size. He is also very intelligent, and there are accounts of how he and Nyikang, in contest with Dimo, were able to blind Dimo's people and his cattle, thus forcing Dimo to give up the fire, which he had hidden, and to release the rain, which he had stopped. The significance of this power of Nyikang and Dak to cause blindness will later be suggested. Here we remark that the effigy of Dak, used in the ceremonies for the installation of the king, is now a long figure made from bamboo and surmounted with black ostrich feathers, and that Dak is still a symbol of the warlike qualities of the Shilluk king. He is the fighter while Nyikang is the leader. The third son, Cal, who is also represented in effigy in the ceremonies for the installation of the king, is made not of ambatch, like Nyikang, nor of bamboo, like Dak, but of rope, and the feathers which form his head are the grey feathers of the female ostrich.³ He plays a less important part than Dak or Nyikang in the ceremonies. We are told that Cal was a coward, and therefore Nyikang thought it safe for him to remain with him and Dak, while he sent away another of his sons, Buro, because he was as headstrong as Dak.⁴ It is said that Cal succeeded his father as king, but did not reign for long and disappeared, to be succeeded by his brother

¹ Haden, p. 14. The emblems then were a skin for slinging across the shoulder of the king, and a hat of some kind. Other emblems were later acquired. The story shows how Shilluk ideas of kingship are bound up with the possession of distinguishing emblems by the king.

² Who is sometimes said to be a brother of Nyikang. The relationship varies with the content of the telling of the story.

³ Haden and Thomson, 1946, p. 68.

⁴ Opler, 1918 (i).

173 Dak. In this story, and in the weaker, female associations of the effigy of
 182 Cal, I think we may see represented by contrast the value which the
 643 Shilluk attach to courage and warlike qualities in their king, for the
 aggressive, headstrong Dak supersedes in importance the weaker eldest son,
 Cal. In songs Dak is the symbol of fighting.¹

As a result of Dak's and Nyikang's quarrel with Dimo, Nyikang's wife's
 father, Nyikang and his followers set off once more on their wanderings,
 while Dimo and his people went in the other direction towards the Bahr-el-
 173 Ghazal. It may be noted that Dak, in quarrelling with his mother's people
 182 and cleaving to his father, showed in an exaggerated form the nature of the
 602 loyalties of the royal sons today, as they should ideally be. Their claim to
 importance for the whole kingdom is through their father the king and
 his agnates, and not through their mother's people. A conflict of loyalties
 between the father's and the mother's people, implicit in other Nilotic
 societies, is here resolved in a myth of the Shilluk kingship by the aggression
 of Dak against his maternal uncle Dimo. The main incidents in the further

173 migration of Nyikang, Dak, and their followers, are a fight with Garo, the son
 of the Sun, Cang, and the crossing of a river, said to have been the Bahr-el-
 Ghazal, beyond which Nyikang settled his people in their present kingdom.
 Between them and their present home, there was a river covered with the
 floating vegetation, the *rudd*, which even now accumulates on these reaches
 of the Nile and its tributaries. One of Nyikang's followers, an albino,
 asked Nyikang to clear a way for the people to cross by spearing him in the
 river. Nyikang did so, and this letting of blood cleared a way for the Shilluk
 to reach their present home.² Hence one of Nyikang's many praise-names,
 or titles of honour, means 'crosser of the river' (the Bahr-el-Ghazal). The
 fight with the Sun and his son, an incident which seems to suggest to
 Hofmayr³ some early contact between the Shilluk and the Galla, occurred
 773 when the Shilluk were temporarily settled on the river bank, before cross-
 821 ing. Nyikang then lost a cow. It was reported to be in the herd of the Sun,
 and Dak set out with his followers to reclaim it. He fought with Garo, the
 son of the Sun, and cut off Garo's hand or finger in order to get a silver ring
 or bracelet. In the course of the fight, Nyikang drove the Sun back into the
 sky, and revived his army by sprinkling them with water, or by touching
 them with the silver bracelet. Another version is that Nyikang made the
 Sun shine at night so that the fight might go on.⁴ Others of Nyikang's titles
 673 of honour refer to this victory over the Sun. The silver from the ring or
 773 bracelet is said to have been used for silver emblems—a bracelet and spear

¹ Hofmayr, 1923, p. 63.

² Westermann, 1912, *et al.*

³ Hofmayr, 1923, p. 61, where the Shilluk names for the Sun and his son, Cang and Garo, are said to be similar to those for a division of the Galla, Yangara, Tsangara, or Djindjira, and other details of the story are said to connect with the Galla. If this is so, there must have been some contact between the Western Dinka of the Bahr-el-Ghazal and the Galla, since they have the same story.

⁴ I do not give all the details of this story, of which there are many versions. The account here given follows Hofmayr, 1923, pp. 60-62, and Westermann, 1912, pp. 159-61.

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ornaments—which are among the royal emblems of the Shilluk at the present day, and are given to a new king at his installation.¹ The crossing of the river and the fight with the Sun seem to be occurrences of great imaginative importance for the Shilluk, as they are for the Western Dinka, in whose mythology they appear in a different form, and by whom they are associated, though in different ways, with a mythical leader who in many ways resembles Nyikang. It may be mentioned that the sun, in Shilluk country, seems to be at its hottest at the end of the dry season, just before the rains, and its heat is in a sense overcome when the rains fall. Nyikang is believed to bring the rain, and in that sense still revives his people by sprinkling them with water. At this time, too, those who have been herding cattle for the dry season on islands in the river or in pastures on the east bank of the Nile, must return to their homes on the west bank to cultivate, crossing the river in order to do so. The subduing of the Sun, and the crossing of the river by Nyikang and his followers, thus recur in different form in the lives of the Shilluk. They still have to take their cattle to pasture across the river during the dry season, and return home with them when the rains start. Westermann says that:

The Shilluks along the White Nile cross over to the east bank; likewise the cattle of the Sobat Shilluks descend to the lagoons south of the Sobat. So in both cases they have to cross the rivers, which is, on account of the many crocodiles living in them, not undangerous, and is therefore done with much care and accompanied by weighty ceremonies in order to keep the crocodiles away; this forms an important part of the duties of the witch-doctor.²

In the account he gives of such a river crossing, it is said that the cattle are led behind ambatch canoes which the Shilluk use.³ It will be remembered that the effigy of the 'crosser of the river', Nyikang, used in the installation ceremonies for the king is also made of ambatch.⁴ Nyikang is important for that crossing on which the Shilluk herds depend for their grazing. In another Shilluk text Nyikang asks his mother, Nyakaya, to dry up the river in order to help his people against foreign enemies.⁵

In the stories here summarized, Nyikang, the leader and first king of the Shilluk, is able to affect celestial phenomena—he may also raise winds and bring rain—and he divides the river to lead his people across. By agnatic descent he is linked either with a man from heaven or with a special creation of God, and through his mother, Nyakaya, he is linked with the river. He is also the leader by whom the Shilluk were first differentiated as a separate people, and who gave them their present land. His praise-names and titles of honour acknowledge and record his association with sky, river, and earth. Apart from those already mentioned, he has the names 'heaven'

¹ Crendish, 1938, p. 39.

² Westermann, 1912, Introduction, xix-xx.

³ Ibid., p. 172.

⁴ Thomson, 1928, p. 139. This is a correction of Howell and Thomson, 1928, where it is said that the effigy of Nyikang was made of bamboo, like that of his son Dak.

⁵ Hadeney, 1902, p. 12.

772 or 'the above', and 'cloud'; he is called 'son of the Nile' and 'son of the
773 river'; and in hymns¹ he is called 'our earth' or 'master of the earth'. Thus,
776 all three regions of the Shilluk universe are nominally assimilated to Nyikang, and he to them. It is the single person of Nyikang which gives all three regions their coherence in a single world. There is no other figure in Shilluk mythology, except his successors and representatives the Shilluk kings, who thus associates earth, sky, and river, belonging in part to all.

Significance of Nyikang in the Shilluk World View

776 Although Nyikang was a man, and is conceived as such by the Shilluk, he is believed not to have died, and thus he is not identified with ordinary men.² He is said to have disappeared. Oyler³ gives some of the expressions which the Shilluk use of Nyikang's end; 'he was lost', 'he returned to his country', 'he went up', 'he became wind', 'he went and lives': all expressions implying that he did not die. He adds that the Shilluk say 'that if Nikawng should die, the whole Shilluk race would perish'. Even now the king of the Shilluk is not spoken of as having died, though the later Shilluk kings, unlike Nyikang and his immediate successors, are thought to have become mortal. Since, as I have suggested, Nyikang is a notion by which the Shilluk apprehend a unity and coherence in the specifically Shilluk world, it is understandable that now, when a king dies, the Shilluk say, 'there is no land—the Shilluk country has ceased to be'.⁴ It is not simply that Nyikang and his successors are thought to maintain the order of the Shilluk social and natural universe as though from a position above and outside it. In Nyikang, and in the kings, the parts which make up that order are correlated, and the correlation is apprehended in a single term, Nyikang. He and his successors are thought of as real historical persons, living at their own particular times and with their own unique characteristics and legends. They also represent the idea of a timeless state, unaffected by the chronological succession of events. Every king, representing Nyikang, represents the principle which unifies the Shilluk as a nation, and brings into focus the widest range of specifically Shilluk ideas about the order of nature and of society.

182 It was Nyikang who first separated the Shilluk people from others of the
773 same stock, who ordered them not to mix with their early enemies,⁵ who
776 differentiated them among themselves by associating different lineages with different territories and, where totemic, with different totema, and who made the territorial divisions of Shilluk-land. Thus, he is both a unifying and a differentiating principle in Shilluk thought. The processes of individuation and separation, attributed to Nyikang, involve the creation of the ordered relationship of the individual and separate parts to each other, as the Shilluk understand it. Myths of Nyikang are ways of apprehending that relationship. It is said, for example, that the Nuba have some right,

¹ Hildmayr, 1923, p. 43.
² Ibid., p. 45.
³ Howell and Thomson, 1946, p. 18.

⁴ Ibid., *passim*.
⁵ Oyler, 1928 III, p. 115.
⁶ Hildmayr, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

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which is now not exercised, to take part in the election of the Shilluk king. This right comes from Nyikang, who originally married his daughter to a Nuba, and received from the Nuba an inlaid stool, a replica of which is now the 'throne' of the Shilluk.¹ Such a myth, for the Shilluk, gives the Nuba a customary place in the social order of the Shilluk world. There are other examples which show that Nyikang explains differentiation, as he explains the relationship between the differentiated parts. One illustration may be taken from a myth of Nyikang's making people from animals,² and another, from the nature of the territorial divisions of the Shilluk kingdom.

It is said that when Nyikang first arrived in his land with his followers, he made people for his kingdom out of insects, fish, and animals. These he captured and turned into human beings, and they are the origin of the Shilluk common people. After Nyikang had made these people from the animal creation, 'the parent stock was removed by death', so that their children might not know of their origin. So the Shilluk common people derive their humanity, and their separateness from the animal creation, from the action of Nyikang.³ who thus both separated them from the non-human creation, and also established an ordered relationship between some of the descent groups of his kingdom and various non-human species. According to another account, Nyikang alone was able to recognize that men were masquerading as animals and, seeing through this confusion, he captured them and made them into the men they really were.⁴ This story shows Nyikang able to distinguish between appearance and reality, and to assimilate the reality to his kingdom.

Partition of the Shilluk kingdom by Nyikang

The clearest example of Nyikang's position in Shilluk cosmology—that is, their apprehension of the differentiation and the correlation of the parts of their world—is to be found in the territorial partition of the Shilluk kingdom, and this is here described at some length. Nyikang is thought to have entered present Shilluk country in the south-west, near Tonga, and to have moved along the west bank of the river until he established the northern limits of his country near Muomo, founding villages on the way, and associating them with his followers, his clients, or himself. The dominant lineages of various Shilluk settlements thus owe their association with the land in which they live to Nyikang. Westermann says that the Shilluk themselves think of their land as a whole by referring to Tonga and Muomo, its most northerly and southerly settlements, which term 'corresponds exactly to the expression of the ancient Hebrews: from Dan unto Berekhah'.⁵ Shilluk country is now divided into two provinces, Ger, or Gerr, in the north and

¹ Haden, 1902, p. 31.

² Westermann, 1916, p. 126; Olyn, 1928, pp. 111, 112.

³ Haden, op. cit., p. 313.

⁴ Olyn, 1928 (2), p. 112.

⁵ Westermann, op. cit., Introduction, 22.

651 Luak in the south, which, in some situations, are politically opposed to each
 793 other. These territorial and political divisions are associated, but not coterminous, with two religious divisions which Howell and Thomson call 'sees'.¹ One of these is called Gol Dhiang, and corresponds to the province of Ger and northern Shilluk-land. The other is called Gol Nyikang, and corresponds to Luak and southern Shilluk-land, which Nyikang first settled. These two religious divisions are separated by a stream or inlet of the river, the ceremonial crossing of which by the king-elect forms part of the ceremonies at his installation. The theme of crossing the river, already referred to, is thus repeated in the installation ceremonies for the Shilluk kings, and we find elsewhere how important in Shilluk thought is the crossing from one bank to another. There is, for example, a riddle, the ideas contained in which must seem curious to those for whom the separation of the banks of a river does not have such imaginative value. The riddle asks 'What is a big man, who knows only one bank?' and the answer is 'an island'. Hofmayr explains that an island, unlike the river or the stream, has only one bank.² There can thus be no crossing from bank to bank.

631 Ger and Luak each comprise a number of districts, which are the loose
 616 confederacies already mentioned, and seem to have been much modified by Turkish and British rule. It is clear, however, that in the past the really important divisions of Shilluk-land were the religious moieties, Gol Dhiang and Gol Nyikang, and that the boundary between them was the inlet of the river, called Arpejur, which is said to mean 'the gathering of the peoples'. Each of these moieties was divided into settlements. Of these settlements, some of which have given their names to the administrative districts to which they now belong, four were of special traditional importance. These were Masomo and Tonga, guarding the northern and southern marches, and the two settlements divided by the stream Arpejur and facing each other across the boundary between the moieties. The leaders of these latter settlements represented their whole moieties in the election of the Shilluk king, so that in this situation the leader of one settlement was also the leader of Gol Nyikang, and the leader of the other was also the leader of Gol Dhiang.³ Just north of the boundary between Gol Nyikang and Gol Dhiang, and therefore technically in the northern moiety Gol Dhiang, is the present royal capital, Fashoda. The king's clan seems to be well represented on both sides of the boundary between these moieties.

In describing the Shilluk divisions of their country, it is easy to introduce the notion of an administrative system, with an element of superordination and subordination in the relations between the larger territorial units and

¹ Howell and Thomson, 1948, p. 73.

² Hofmayr, 1925, p. 280.

³ The history of the boundary between northern and southern Shilluk-land has been very confused. The details of this confusion do not affect Shilluk cosmology. Some of the information here given is from Pomphrey, 1941, but the main analysis of the significance of the religious moieties is taken from the way they functioned at the installation of the King Arat Koo, recorded by Howell and Thomson, 1948, and from the analysis given in Evans-Pritchard, 1948.

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the smaller units which they comprise. Such a logical model would be misleading for the interpretation of the significance of the moieties, Gol Nyikang and Gol Dhiang. These seem to function primarily, if not exclusively, in the election of the Shilluk kings, successors to Nyikang. In the election of 1943-4, of which we have a full description,¹ the two leaders of the religious moieties had first to reach agreement upon the successor of the dead king, and their choice was confirmed by a representative of the king's clan, which is not identified with either moiety. An electoral college, representing various settlements of Shilluk-land, then confirmed the choice, which, according to Shilluk custom, had to be one of the princes whose father had already been king. In this case the choice was very limited, and the electoral college at once accepted the proposal made by the leaders of Gol Nyikang and Gol Dhiang. Disagreement between these over the choice of the king is said to have led to fighting between the moieties in the past, and thus to civil war in Shilluk-land.

The division of the kingdom into Gol Dhiang and Gol Nyikang thus becomes effective at the election of the king, and the preliminaries to the installation of the new king do indeed create the division which Nyikang, the king's ancestor, is said to have created in the past.² When the leaders of the moieties have reached agreement, there is still a ceremonial opposition between them until the king has actually been installed, when the moieties are again put together in a single kingdom, the kingdom which Nyikang originally united under himself. The Shilluk kings conceive their country as a unity by dividing it into moieties, which separate and then unite, over the election of the king. The theme of the resolution of duality and separateness, perhaps an idea paralleled by that of crossing from one bank to another of the river, in order to make a unity consciously recognized by the Shilluk, may also be seen in other features of the installation ceremonies of 1943. The Shilluk king must be possessed by, or identified with, Nyikang, so that some writers say that he 'incarnates' Nyikang. At the installation ceremonies an effigy of Nyikang is brought from northern Shilluk-land, where Nyikang is said to have disappeared during a dance.³ There is a mock fight between this effigy, accompanied by the effigies of Dak and Cal, and the king-elect. In this fight the king first retreats from the effigy, is then captured by it, and finally must seize from it a small girl, who plays an important part in the ceremonies. She appears to represent the wife of the king's office and, since the king is to take the place of Nyikang, who represents that office, he must also take the wife. Hostility between the king-

¹ The election may have been considerably modified by European and earlier rule, and the element of election by vote may have been stressed at the expense of a rather different principle, described below (p. 127).

² Howell and Thomson, 1948, p. 30. Pumphrey (1941) quotes a story in which the ancestors of Gol Dhiang, which may well be of later foundation than Gol Nyikang, is attributed to a later Shilluk king, but it is still a king who made it. This seems to refer to an earlier stage in the evolution of the kingship. Here we speak of the kingdom as it was at the election of 1943.

³ Mathews, 1952, p. 42.

643 elect and the effigy of Nyikang then ceases, and the effigies are returned to their shrines and the king is installed. Thus, in order that the king-elect of the Shilluk shall be understood to have become one with Nyikang, separation and opposition between him and the effigy of Nyikang are created and resolved after fighting in mock battle. This resolution of the separateness of the king-elect and Nyikang is also a unification of the moiety of the Shilluk kingdom for, in the mock fighting, Goi Nyikang supports the king-elect, while Goi Dhiang supports the effigy of Nyikang. Here again Nyikang and the Shilluk king may be seen to represent the principle by which the whole Shilluk kingdom is differentiated into parts, and by which these parts are again comprehended in a whole. In the installation of the new king the unity and integrity of the Shilluk kingdom under Nyikang and the king are stressed at the same time as the necessary nature of its parts. The uniting of the parts is not then a function of their subordination to a larger national whole, to which their rights to separate existence are surrendered.¹ It is a function of the acceptance by all of Nyikang and the king, through whom are understood the notions of unity in diversity, which have here been briefly discussed.

The Concept of Juak (God)

182 There is a Shilluk proverb which says that 'the Shilluk customs come
776 from Nyikang',² and I have preferred to suggest something of the general significance of Nyikang, rather than to exemplify in detail all the customs which the Shilluk say are derived from him. For, in saying that their customs derive from Nyikang, the Shilluk are speaking both of an original and supposedly historical king, and of complex notions of order and permanence which form what we should have to call a metaphysical system. When the Shilluk make an ideal correlation, whether of parts of the body social, or parts of Shilluk-land, or parts of the natural physical ambient, they introduce the concept of Nyikang. By reference to him they make the most inclusive summary of the detailed order of their world and grasp that order in a single term.

776 Nyikang is necessary for the Shilluk understanding of their social and spatial categories, but he does not explain his own existence, nor the grounds for the reality which, for the Shilluk, he ordered in the categories by which they comprehend it. The nature of that reality is understood through the notion of juak, God, to which I now turn. It has already been said that the Shilluk explain the superiority and dominance of foreigners by a preference shown them by juak. In Shilluk story it is juak, not Nyikang, who created the world, and juak is the being who maintains it and informs it in its entirety. We have so far considered, in the Shilluk understanding of Nyikang, a notion by which a wide range of phenomena are comprehended in their interrelations and explained; to that extent we have

¹ In contradistinction to some European theories of the nation-state.

² Halmayr, 1929, p. 374.

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considered Nyikang in the form of an abstraction somewhat removed from the real person he is for the Shilluk. Even for the Shilluk there is an element of the ideal in Nyikang, who is to that extent an abstraction. Their divine being, *jauk*, is a still more abstract notion and ultimately explains a wider range of diverse phenomena. 776

Jauk is usually said to be the supreme being of the Shilluk, to be spirit, and to be 'the greatest spirit', and to be in some sense above Nyikang.¹ He is thus not inappropriately spoken of as 'God', provided that the use of this name is not allowed to introduce a more sharply defined concept of his nature than the notion of him formed by the Shilluk themselves. In many cases it would make the Shilluk texts more intelligible, and involve fewer contradictions in translation, if we were to think of *jauk* not so much as the supreme being in a quasi-social hierarchy of 'beings', but as that being upon which, for the Shilluk, everything else is contingent. It is clear that if the Shilluk are asked whether God has a body or is spiritual, they answer that he is spiritual or 'like the wind', for he exists for them in no single mode, is omnipresent or multipresent, and is invisible. I do not think, however, that this separation between the material and the spiritual, by which *jauk* must be placed in one or the other category, is one which would spontaneously occur to the Shilluk. They have different words for the 'spirits' of the dead. 'Spirit' generally, if it is to be distinguished from matter or body, is *wet*, which comes from the common Nilotic root meaning life or breath, and thus soul or spirit, and distinguishes what is active and alive from what is inert and lifeless. So, in translating the word *jauk* as 'God', and saying that he is spirit, it is desirable not to introduce foreign conceptions of the nature of the Shilluk God as he is in himself. There is no Shilluk definition of his nature comparable to that with which those accustomed to revealed religions are familiar. [777]

Jauk, the being which created and still maintains all the world and what is in it, is one in essence, though, as it were, with many facets, which seem to refract him into a multiplicity of 'beings'. These resemble what we think of as spirits and manifestations of various sorts, and for us our use of these different words is enough to separate what they denote, conceptually, from God. For the Shilluk, who use the same word *jauk* for each item in the multiplicity of forms and manifestations, and also for the principle manifest in them all, the conceptual distinction between the supreme being and other beings associated but not identical with him is not verbally made.

Hafsmay records a complex metaphysical statement made about *jauk* by a Shilluk, who explained that *jauk*, God, 'is from one side spirit (*wet*), and from the other side spirit, but from front and back he is body (*delf*).² By this we can only understand that the human experience of *jauk* may be an experience of something which takes material forms, but that these have

¹ The fuller account of the meaning of the word *jauk* is in Hafsmay, op. cit., and most of what follows comes from that source unless otherwise indicated.

² Op. cit., p. 109.

- 776 a third, a spiritual or ideal, dimension. To put this in another way, the Shilluk quotation suggests that what is material has another, non-material, dimension, and we are told that *juk* is 'present to a greater or lesser degree in all things'.¹ Although *juk*, as the first principle, is the ultimate explanation for everything, the notion of *juk* seems to be particularly used to account for such phenomena as elude explanation in less abstract terms. It is a necessary logical concept for the Shilluk. Seligman quotes Dr. Healy as saying of *juk* that 'he appears to be one, and yet seems to be a plurality as well . . . anything the Shilluk cannot understand is *juk*'.² That is, what the Shilluk cannot otherwise account for, they account for by this concept. So, for example, the creation of the world and of life is the work of *juk*, and he may also be an explanation for sickness and death. The presence and powers of the foreigners are explained with reference to *juk*, for those who are specially gifted are supposed to be so by virtue of the stronger flow, in them, of the being which created and animates the universe. *Juk*, therefore, is the support of Nyikang and the Shilluk kings. Since they represent, for the Shilluk, the order of the society and the world in which they live, and since *juk* has his place in that order, it is to be expected that for them Nyikang should also be an indication of the nature of God. So, in what Hofmayr says is the oldest Shilluk song, Nyikang is represented as speaking for God 'thus God says'.³ This association between God and Nyikang is, of course, what has led to the anthropological study of Nyikang and his successors as 'divine kings'. God and Nyikang are two terms of Shilluk thought which cannot be reduced to any third term, but co-exist and participate in each other.

Relation of Nyikang to God

- 776 Examples of this are numerous. It is said that there are few direct appeals to God, and that Nyikang is usually invoked as an intermediary. Westermann quotes a prayer which 'is said to be the only prayer to *juk*', and says that the Shilluk were taught it by Nyikang. This explanation was, presumably, given him by a Shilluk, and is an example of their interpretation of God by Nyikang already mentioned. Part of the prayer runs:
- [537] There is no one above thee, thou God. Thou becomest the grandfather of Nyikang; it is thou (Nyikang) who walkest with God; thou becomest the grandfather (of man), and thy son Dik. If famine comes, is it not given by thee? Is as this cow stands here, is it not thou; if she dies, does her blood not go to thee? Thou God, and thou who becomest Nyikang, and thy son Dik! But the soul (of man), is it not thine own? It is thou who liest up (the sick).⁴
- 776 The association between Nyikang and God in this prayer is so close that it is sometimes difficult to know which is addressed. Since the Shilluk myth and tradition tell them much more about the nature of Nyikang, who is a man, than about the nature of God, who is not, it is to be expected that they

¹ Huxell and Thomson, 1946, p. 8.

² Hofmayr, 1949, p. 2.

³ E. G. Seligman, 1930, p. 74.

⁴ Westermann, 1910, p. 171.

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should understand the more abstract notion, God, by the less abstract, Nyikang. A still clearer example of the approximation of Nyikang to God in Shilluk thought is to be found in a prayer, part of which runs:

We praise you, you who are God. Protect us, we are in your hands, and protect us, save me. You and Nikawng, you are the ones, who created, . . . and it is you Nikawng, who are accustomed to assist God to save, and it is you who give the rain. The sun is yours, and the sea (river) is yours, you who are Nikawng . . . The cow (for sacrifice) is here for you, and the blood will go to God and you.¹

Here also may be seen the attribution to Nyikang of control of the sun and the river which, along with the rain mentioned in the first prayer, are the features of the Shilluk world upon which their prosperity ultimately depends, and which may help or ruin them.

God, Nyikang, and the Shilluk kings seem to form a continuum in the Shilluk religious system. Nyikang is thus sometimes called *juok piny* (*piny* being earth or world) while God is either simply *juok*, or *juok mal*, God above. The Shilluk king, the representative of Nyikang, is chosen ultimately by God, as he is accepted and possessed proximately by Nyikang. A long Shilluk epic begins with the lines 'Nyikang joined with God, the election was held . . .', the election being that of King Kur.² There are reports of a form of election slightly different from that described earlier in this essay. In Hofmayr's account the king-elect is agreed upon by the electors much in the way described, but Nuba from Liri, with whom Nyikang formed a relationship, are said to come with pebbles, which represent those who have a right to succeed. These pebbles, one of which has been prepared beforehand to represent the chosen candidate, are thrown into the fire, and the pebble representing the king-elect turns red, or white, or red and white. Red stands for prosperity in cattle, white for good crops. The chosen prince is then challenged to fight at night and, if he acquits himself well, he is told that he is a brave man, and that God has decreed that he shall be king of the Shilluk. The installation ceremonies then proceed. At one point in them, when the king-elect enters the village of Debalo on his way to the capital at Fashoda, the chief of Debalo asks him, 'What do you want here?' and the king-elect replies, 'I am the man sent by God to rule the land of the Shilluk.'³ Despite the election there is thus a 'fiction' that it is God who chooses the Shilluk king and is the ultimate support of the Shilluk kingship. The order of the Shilluk kingdom depends upon Nyikang and the king, and Nyikang and the king derive their positions from God.

The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk

The connexion between God and Nyikang is of great importance in defining the sort of 'divine kingship' which is the central feature of the Shilluk

¹ Opler, 1928, (2) p. 282.

² Hofmayr, 1925, p. 451.

³ Hofmayr, 1925, pp. 145 ff. Wenemann, (1928, p. 122) gives an account of yet another form of election, in which sticks are placed in a fire, the one which flames most representing the king-elect.

776 cosmological system. *Juk* and *Nyikang* are the most general explanatory concepts the Shilluk have, *juk* or God accounting for the existence and nature of reality, and *Nyikang* for the way in which the Shilluk order and interpret it. Though *Nyikang* may be called *juk piy* (God below) he does not represent the totality of what the concept of God means to the Shilluk. God is also apprehended in other ways, and is addressed as God the Protector, God the Giver, God the Creator, and by other titles which correspond to the various situations in which the Shilluk need to invoke him, or explain effects which they attribute to him. *Juk* is thus a common explanation for illness, for the Shilluk seem to use this word to account for what is unknown in its nature but experienced in its effects.

[753] The Shilluk God is the final explanation both for what is good and what is evil, from a human point of view, but he is not himself good or evil. Howell describes him as 'a remote and amoral deity . . . present to a greater or lesser degree in all things',¹ and there are many indications in the literature that it would be a mistake to understand, by the Shilluk word for God, a being which could be defined in ethical terms. It is well, in discussing Shilluk ideas, to distinguish their ethical from their religious conceptions; for though *Nyikang* is the foundation of and sanction for Shilluk customary behaviour, and God is the support of *Nyikang*, in neither case is there any emphasis on intrinsic ethical qualities. *Nyikang* is not the teacher or founder of an ethical system, and the attributes which he shares with God refer, not to judgements of ethical value, but to the nature of reality and its interpretation. In the biographies of the Shilluk kings their traditional reputations are not mainly founded upon whether they were just or virtuous, but upon whether the Shilluk prospered under them, whether they were effective in war, whether they were brave, and whether they were clever. Their caprices are also remembered.

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Nyikang and *Dak* were the most important Shilluk kings and may be regarded as models of what the ideal Shilluk king should be. Some account of their lives has already been given, but it has perhaps not been made clear that the stories recorded of them emphasise their intrigues, deceptions, and intelligence, and the craftiness which seems for the Shilluk to be a sign of the particular gifts of God. Thus, in the story of the attempt by *Dimo* to kill *Dak*, when *Nyikang* made the effigy which was speared in *Dak*'s stead, it is said that *Dimo* said 'Nyikang is a fool, but *Dak* is full of talk', which means, says Oyster, that *Dak* was a man of ideas. He also says that *Nyikang* 'was an inventor, and many of the things in everyday use . . . were first made by *Nyikang*'. In their contests with *Dimo*, *Nyikang* and *Dak* show themselves both more powerful and cleverer, and in this cleverness they are alike. *Dak* particularly, the son who effectively succeeds his father and is second in importance only to *Nyikang* himself, is shown to be not only

¹ Howell and Thomson, 1946, p. 8.

[114] ² Oyster, 1918 (i), p. 108. In this account, it is said that *Dak* made the effigy, though in other accounts, e.g. Westermann, 1914, p. 129, *Nyikang* made the effigy.

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mischievous and aggressive, but also a trickster who (vainly) attempts to deceive his father for his own advantage.¹ Westermann² quotes a text in which Nyikang commends a liar (perhaps a licensed jester), and another in which it is made clear that it was Dak's cunning which resulted in the catching of one of the creatures, described as a *jack*, with which the Shilluk kingdom was originally built up. The traditions of the Shilluk kings recorded by Hofmeyr give details of their duplicity and cunning, their military prowess, and their cruelty and caprice. In this way they are approximated to God for these, and particularly intelligence and knowledge, are qualities by which a man manifests the power of God in him. The very nature of the election to the Shilluk kingship gives an advantage to the clever, as well as to the ruthless and brave, and the office must constantly have offered opportunities for intrigue and homicide. These features of 'divine kingship' tend to be somewhat elided in European accounts of the sacred character of the office, but some of the interest of the Shilluk kingship lies in the fact that the sort of sacredness it represents is little associated with an ethical code. Nyikang and the kings, along with God, are nevertheless for the Shilluk the sanctions for the customary rules and norms of behaviour. Thus the sanction for the customary moral order of Shilluk society is not conceived primarily in ethical terms, but as a manifestation of successful power and intelligence. So the test of kingship is success in the widest sense, and an unsuccessful king is soon killed by his rivals or disposed of by his retainers.³

Social Values: Cleverness and Success

That intelligence and success are attributed to the favour of God may be seen in other ways. Spirits, or those who are divinely inspired, are shown in Shilluk stories to be both clever and successful. They know more than others, and they can turn this knowledge to their own advantage. The Shilluk *ajunge* (diviners), whose power is said to come from *jack*, are such people, and Oyler says of them that 'the Shilluks think of the witch-doctors or medicine men as good, not because their lives are good, nor yet because their practice is good, but because they are looked upon as the channels through which occult powers may be transmitted to men'.⁴ They are personally prosperous because they are necessary, and they are necessary because they know better than ordinary men how to achieve success; such a divinely inspired person may therefore be approached for help in stealing

¹ Hofmeyr, 1923, p. 61.² 1912, p. 188.

³ I have deliberately omitted any discussion of the killing of the Shilluk king, which by some authorities is said to be a ritual putting to death when the king's powers fail. The evidence for this is very confusing; in the records of the kings given by Hofmeyr (1923), some clearly have died or been killed without ceremonial. It is difficult to reconcile this with the suggestion made by some authorities that the killing of the king is a ritual act performed to maintain the fertility and vitality of the land, cattle, and people, and that the ceremonial killing is believed to be essential for this, though misfortune for the whole land may later be attributed to some inadequacy in the funeral rites.

⁴ Oyler, 1920.

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[15] a cow, for example. In a text given by Westermann¹ the hare is taught and
[77] saved by *juak*. The hare (or rabbit) is said by Hofmayr to be the favourite
figure in many Shilluk animal stories, and the stories quoted by him and by
Westermann show how clever, and how lucky, the hare is. A story given by
Hofmayr² about the hare's eating young crocodiles appears in a different
form in Westermann³ where this act is attributed to Dak, the clever son
of Nyikang. The moral of these stories is that astuteness and trickery, like
knowledge, pay, and it seems as though unusual intelligence, ingenuity,
and luck associate those who possess them with the divine intelligence,
and the success for which God is the Shilluk explanation. Hofmayr gives
as a translation for the Shilluk expression *juaka taro*, 'that which I have
from the highest being, my soul, my lot, luck, my other self, is favourable
to me'.⁴ The large number of Shilluk riddles is an indication of the high
value set on cleverness and ingenuity, and it is to be expected that these
qualities, held up for admiration in their stories and in their daily life,
should be ideally associated with Nyikang and their kings.

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986 The kings, and all others inspired by *juak*, are sacred because they mani-
fest divine energy and knowledge, and they do so by being strong, cunning,
and successful, as well as by appearing to be in closer touch with the supra-
human than are ordinary men. The signs of this closer communion are dreams
and 'hysterical' possession, or at least some outward sign of contact with a
superior power. Examples of behaviour showing this are numerous. In the
installation ceremonies of 1943, when the king-elect was set on the sacred
stool of Nyikang at a climax in the ceremony, we are told that 'the rock
(king) was seized with a trembling fit at the critical moment, and certainly
he appeared to be in a dazed condition immediately afterwards'.⁵ This
[77] form of behaviour is a common sign of possession by a power greater than
human among other Nilotic peoples. Though there was some reference
643 in these ceremonies to the king as the source of justice, and to the ethical
qualities necessary in a ruler, they were clearly distinct from the central re-
ligious significance of the ceremonies. So also, though we find many refer-
ences in Shilluk texts to God as the helper of the poor and the final court
of appeal in trouble, his activity in these respects is not to be taken as an
indication that he is only or primarily an apothecosis of ethical virtue. Many
of the hymns to Nyikang and God are laments that the land is being de-
stroyed because they are not helping, and we are told that when their
prayers are not answered, the Shilluk may curse Nyikang for not assisting
them.⁶ A Shilluk proverb says that 'God throws good and evil men on a
single string', suggesting that, in some circumstances at least, God does not
seem to reward virtue and punish vice.⁷ In other texts he is shown as the
ultimate sanction for customary ethical behaviour, as a helper, and as a

¹ 1922, p. 186.² Op. cit., 193.³ Howell and Thomson, 1946, p. 62.⁴ Hofmayr, 1923, p. 376.⁵ 1943, p. 376.⁶ Op. cit., p. 193.⁷ Opler, 1948 (ii), p. 182.

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judge, for, as the source of both good and evil, he can be regarded as indifferent, or friendly, or hostile, according to the judgement of the individual in any particular situation. His existence is taken for granted, and what people know or think of him does not alter nor define nor limit him. It is suggested by Hofmeyr that the idea of punishment for wrong done is connected rather with the dissatisfied dead and with the ancestors than with the direct action of God. It is they who bring it about that God punishes the guilty.¹ Such beliefs are accompanied with very little elaboration of ideas about the state of the dead. Stories about the land of the dead, where all is quiet, as it is in the Shilluk capital of Fashoda, seem to represent fancies rather than traditionally formulated beliefs. The dead are in some sense nearer to God than are the living for they exist increasingly in a world of ideas, as the impressions they left upon their descendants become fainter with the passage of time; but, as another Shilluk proverb says, 'man does not think about death'. They pray that they may be helped in this life.

Association of Nyikang with Light and Knowledge

Mention was made earlier of a contest between Dak and Dima, in which Dak struck his opponents blind, until they accepted his superiority, when he restored their sight. The same story is sometimes told of Nyikang and Duwa.² Since Nyikang and Dak represent the way in which the Shilluk know the order of their world, as well as being themselves examples of knowledge and intelligence, it is appropriate that the power to blind people should be attributed to them in myth. Another myth tells how Nyikang, in order to capture some sorcerers for his country, covered the earth with a shadow so that they could not see anything.³ This association of Nyikang with seeing and light, and thus, I suggest, with knowledge and understanding, occurs again in the belief that Nyikang sometimes shows himself in dreams as a bright light;⁴ he appears also, among other forms, as a white bull. Dak and other kings appear also in the form of a white egret. The logic of this symbolism is not specifically examined in the literature, but in Shilluk thought there seems to be some association between light and sight, and Nyikang and the kings. In the installation ceremonies of 1943, we are told that 'all objects of great sanctity were covered in white cloth ... with all cattle [for sacrifice] it was evident how careful the Shilluk were to see that the animal was blindfold'.⁵ At the conclusion of the sacrifices which marked the stages towards the complete installation of the king, then representing Nyikang, these wrappings were torn off. The significance of this may be partly that such objects, which are holy, are also dangerous to ordinary men who must be protected from them. In the installation ceremonies, the Shilluk fled when they supposed that Nyikang had come, and again fled from the effigy of Dak, with 'a mixture of fear and laughter'.⁶ One

¹ Ibid., p. 212.² Wessmann, 1912, p. 158.³ Howell and Thomson, 1946, p. 74.⁴ Olyn, 1948, III, p. 108.⁵ Seligman, 1930, p. 76.⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

643 these of these ceremonies was the avoidance of Nyikang and a fear of his
781 power, accompanied by the veiling of the objects particularly associated
with him. The complexity of this behaviour, particularly the 'fear and
laughter', demands a more penetrating analysis than is possible here.

Conclusion

121 In such a brief account it has been possible to give only an outline of the
772 cosmological ideas and social values of the Shilluk, and it has been in-
evitable also that these should have been somewhat over-formalised and
systematised. Shilluk cosmological ideas are embedded in belief and action.
They are not systematised by the people themselves, who reveal them only
by their sayings and their behaviour. It is impossible to give an account of
them without abstracting them from the reality, formulating them as ideas
with a certain degree of coherence between them, and thus constructing a
system which has no exact counterpart in the thought of the Shilluk them-
selves. Such an account is bound to show, here and there, that effort to
achieve consistency which is part of our tradition, but not of theirs. I have
776 tried to show how the order known to the Shilluk is dependent upon their
belief in a mythical hero and king, Nyikang, who is the figure to which
every subsequent Shilluk king is assimilated in thought. This assimilation
163 is enacted in the ritual for the installation of each new king. Nyikang is an
643 analogue, for the Shilluk, of the power which created and maintains the
universe. That power, which I have been content to call God, is of greater
importance to the Shilluk as a source of vitality, both intellectual and physical,
than as a being with ethical attributes. Nyikang and the kings similarly
belong not to an ethical, but to a metaphysical system. Shilluk religion is
163 concerned with the maintenance, as a divine order, of the order in which
643 they live and have always lived. The kings, and Nyikang, are held to repre-
sent that order, which without them would not exist. The death of a king
and the installation of his successor, are therefore of critical importance in
the Shilluk kingdom, and that importance is marked by ceremonies of great
imaginative and symbolic richness. The importance and uniqueness of the
king is similarly emphasised by the existence of a special vocabulary used of
him, and by various special observances which may be studied in the literature.
They mark him off from ordinary men, no less than his titles—'first-born
of God', 'child of God', 'reflection of the ancestors', 'master of the world',
'last-born of God', and others. Any particular king, however, is also, as an
individual human being, to some degree unequal to the office. The Shilluk
have an superstitious reverence for the individual human king, and many
kings have been removed by violent death when, for one reason or another,
their people have tired of them. It is, perhaps, chiefly after the climax of the
installation ceremonies that the dignity of the office, and the human nature

[17] * Shilluk, 1952, p. 122. The 'first-born' and the 'last-born' have special names, as
last in Shilluk thought, because the first 'opens the way' for the others, while the other
'closes the way'. They are, so to speak, the alpha and omega of generation.

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of its occupant, are most clearly recognised. Then the elected king, wearing on his wrists the emblematic silver bracelets and followed by a bearer carrying a fan made from the wings of the saddle-billed stork, comes down from the mound of the shrine at Aturwic; he is lifted on to the sacred stool of Nyikang, and receives the allegiance of the chiefs of settlements, who stick their spears into the ground before him. Though he sits in state as a king, he is admonished by the chiefs and told what is expected of him. At the election of 1943-4, the chief of Tonga said to the king: 'Our job is not to keep order, that is your job. Our duty is to supply you with choice morsels of hippo meat.'¹ Although he was speaking of a new, administrative situation, we may see here the idea of the king as a source of social order, who fulfils his function merely by existing. The king's office keeps the Shilluk in palpable relation with an ideal order, which they hold to be the true order of their universe. There is a Shilluk proverb which says that 'the Shilluk only believe what they see'.² In their human king they are also able to see what they believe.

¹ Howell and Thomson, 1948, p. 71.² Hadeney, 1945, p. 377.

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